

Senator Harry Reid

SPECIAL REPORT

Women

I share the concerns of many women in Nevada who worry about how they can access quality health care, advance in the workplace, and support their families. We must continue to address the needs of half of Nevada's residents, or the more than one million women who call the Silver State home. Since entering the Senate, I have launched several initiatives to expand opportunities and open doors for Nevada women.

Fighting for Better Health Care

I have worked to improve health care services for women throughout my career. I helped pass the Family and Medical Leave Act, which has allowed millions of parents to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for a birth, adoption, or serious illness of a child or parents, and to continue to receive health benefits during their leave of absence. I worked to end the practice of "drive-through deliveries" and helped to pass the Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act. This law requires health plans to cover a minimum hospital stay for a mother following the birth of a child.

Approximately 72 percent of caregivers are women, many of them sandwiched between caring for an ailing relative and caring for their own children. Their choice to serve as caregivers is a kind yet difficult one, and I am working to ease the burden they carry for their loved ones. For example, I have supported establishing tax credits and other support programs for elderly and disabled individuals in need of long-term care and their caregivers.

Earlier this year, I introduced the Putting Prevention First Act, bipartisan legislation to end insurance discrimination against women and improve access to family planning programs. The bill expands access to preventive health care services and education

programs that help reduce unintended pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. This comprehensive measure includes the Equity in Prescription and Contraception Coverage Act, bipartisan legislation that I have long championed that would require insurance plans that provide coverage for prescription drugs to provide the same coverage for prescription contraceptives.

When I first began my work as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I was dismayed to find that women-specific diseases had been shortchanged when it came to research funding. I have made it my mission to remedy this inequality. I supported the creation of the Office of Research on Women's Health at the National Institutes of Health and have been a tireless advocate for increased research for a number of illnesses affecting women, including: interstitial cystitis, multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue syndrome, and inflammatory bowel disease, osteoporosis, as well as ovarian, breast and cervical cancer. And while certain illnesses afflict both men and women, they affect women differently. For example, women are more likely than men to suffer a second heart attack. We must continue to fund research to better understand how illnesses affect women and to learn more about diseases that are unique to women.

Breast cancer alone will

claim the lives of 300 women in Nevada this year. I have worked to direct hundreds of millions of dollars to the Department of Defense Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program and to the National Institutes of Health for breast cancer research. I also am the lead sponsor of legislation, the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act, which would give scientists the resources they need to study the potential links between breast cancer and the environment. If passed, this legislation would lead to a better understanding of the causes of breast cancer and improve our ability to prevent new cases of breast cancer.

Making Work Pay

Women deserve equal pay for equal work. Unfortunately, the average woman was paid 76 cents for every dollar her male counterpart was paid in 2002. Even after accounting for differences in education and the amount of time in the work force, women's pay still lags far behind men who are doing the same or similar work. That is why I support the Paycheck Fairness Act, which seeks to strengthen enforcement of the Equal Pay Act and toughen its remedy provisions.

It is also critical that we raise the minimum wage, which has remained stagnant at \$5.15 per hour for the past seven years. Over time, inflation has steadily eroded the purchasing power of the minimum wage, so that it is now 25 percent lower

than it was in 1979. Women comprise nearly two-thirds of minimum wage earners – many of whom are often the sole support for their families. If we want to reward hard work and help ensure the livelihoods of millions of families throughout the country, we must raise the minimum wage, and I'll keep fighting to do so.

Protecting Women at Home and Abroad

We must support the rights of women both at home and abroad. I have sponsored legislation to permanently reverse the global gag rule, a misguided policy that denies funding to groups that promote women's health and reduces the rate of unintended pregnancies by educating women about family planning methods. I also have been a strong supporter of funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), an international organization that provides life-saving reproductive health services, works to prevent female genital mutilation, fights the spread of AIDS, and reduces maternal mortality rates.

We also must demonstrate our support for the women of Afghanistan and Iraq by providing humanitarian relief and basic education for them. I am working with my colleagues in the Senate to ensure that women are included in the rebuilding of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Ending Domestic Violence

I support domestic violence prevention programs as well as programs that provide services to the victims of domestic violence. I cosponsored the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), landmark legislation that significantly expanded the federal government's commitment to eliminating

violence against women. I also worked to pass the Victims of Abuse Access to Health Care Reform Act to prevent insurance companies from denying coverage to domestic violence victims. As a senior member of Senate Appropriations Committee, I am working to increase funding for domestic violence prevention programs, including Battered Women Shelter and Services, Grants to Combat Violence Against Women, and Victims of Crime Act programs.

Protecting Title IX

I support Title IX, and have opposed recent attempts to dismantle this program which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in federally-assisted education programs or activities. The public perception of Title IX revolves around its application to athletics, yet this landmark law applies to every area of gender-based discrimination in an educational setting. Title IX has been instrumental in promoting sports equality for female athletes at high schools and colleges around the nation. Achieving equal opportunity for women in intercollegiate sports, however, remains an ongoing challenge. We need to level the playing field and continue opening up the athletics to more women.

Upholding Women's Rights

The role of the United States Senate in giving its advice and consent to the President's nominations is one of the most important constitutional obligations we have as Senators, and it is a duty that I take very seriously. The judiciary upholds and interprets the law, and I will oppose candidates who have demonstrated a tendency to let ideology drive their interpretation of established

law. We must ensure that federal judges respect the rights of women and will protect the progress we have made towards ending gender discrimination.

While I have worked with the president to confirm nearly 200 of his nominees, resulting in the lowest vacancy rate on the courts in 13 years, I have objected to affording lifetime judicial appointments to individuals who were out of step with the American people. Though partisanship is expected in the political branches of government, it has no place in our courts.

The importance of assuring that our federal courts are occupied by independent, non-partisan individuals is no better demonstrated by the recent federal court decision upholding Nevadans' longstanding argument that Yucca Mountain could not safely store the most dangerous substances known to man. Although the administration made a political decision to move forward with Yucca despite the law and its requirement that Yucca be found safe, these independent judges reviewed the law and impartially interpreted it, redeeming Nevada's rights.

